

**G/T RANCH ACQUISITION PROPOSAL
(Mountain Foothills)**



Proposed by: Adam Grove, Region 3 Wildlife Division

WILDLIFE HABITAT LAND PROJECT PROPOSAL

1. Applicant Name: Mark Deleray – Region 3 Supervisor
2. Date: September 25, 2018
3. Project Name: G/T Ranch Type of Acquisition: Fee Title Acquisition
4. Size:

Approximately 4,818 acres of private property, plus approximately 642 acres of BLM in-holdings. Purchase would also provide access to approximately 646 acres of currently inaccessible adjacent DNRC land to the west of the property.

5. Location:

The property, which is in Broadwater County in Region 3 (HD 391), is approximately 15.5 miles north of Townsend and approximately 21 miles east/southeast of Helena.

6. Map(s): See Figures 1-4

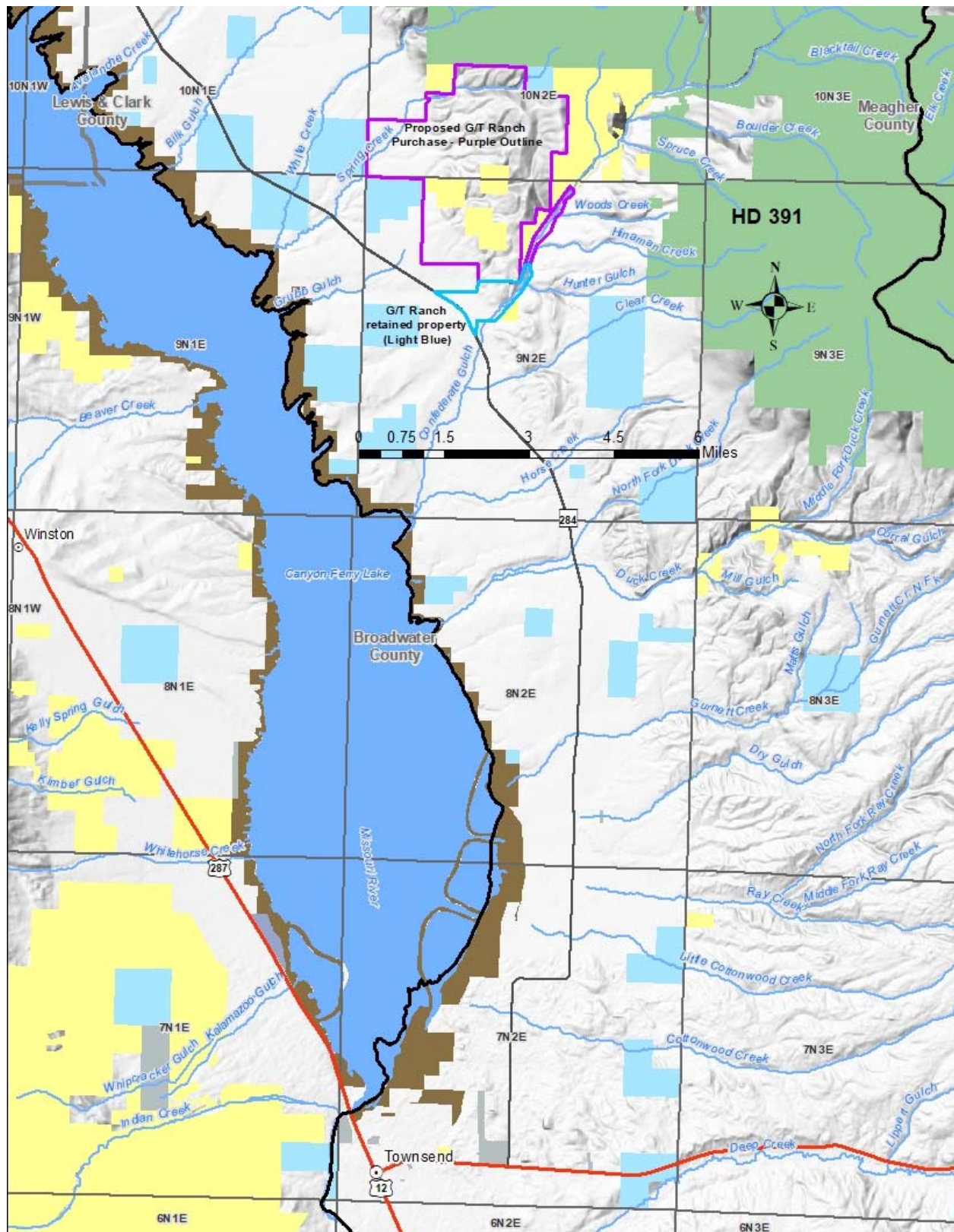


Figure 1: Proposed G/T Ranch acquisition – location and ownership.

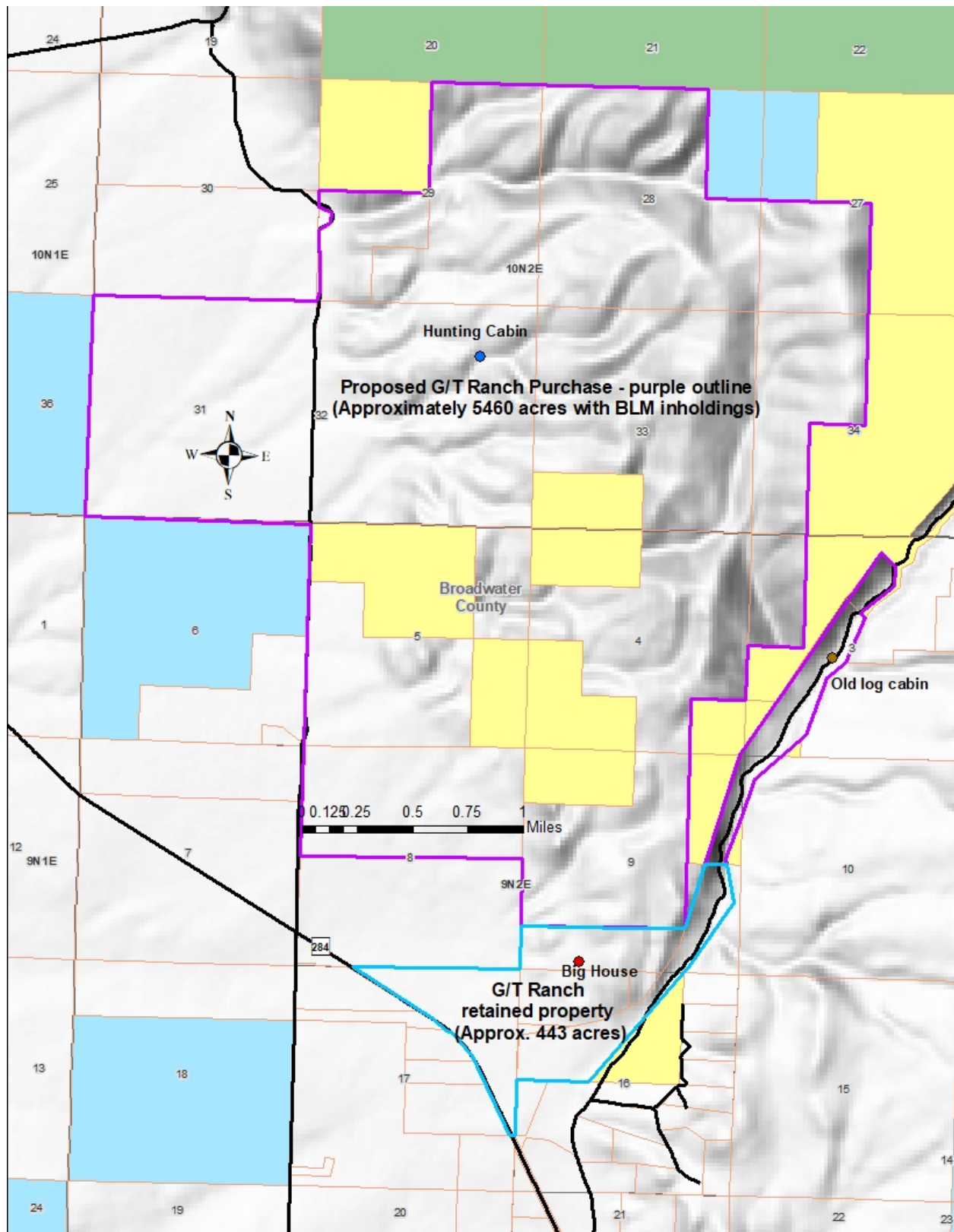


Figure 2: G/T Ranch – zoomed ownership.

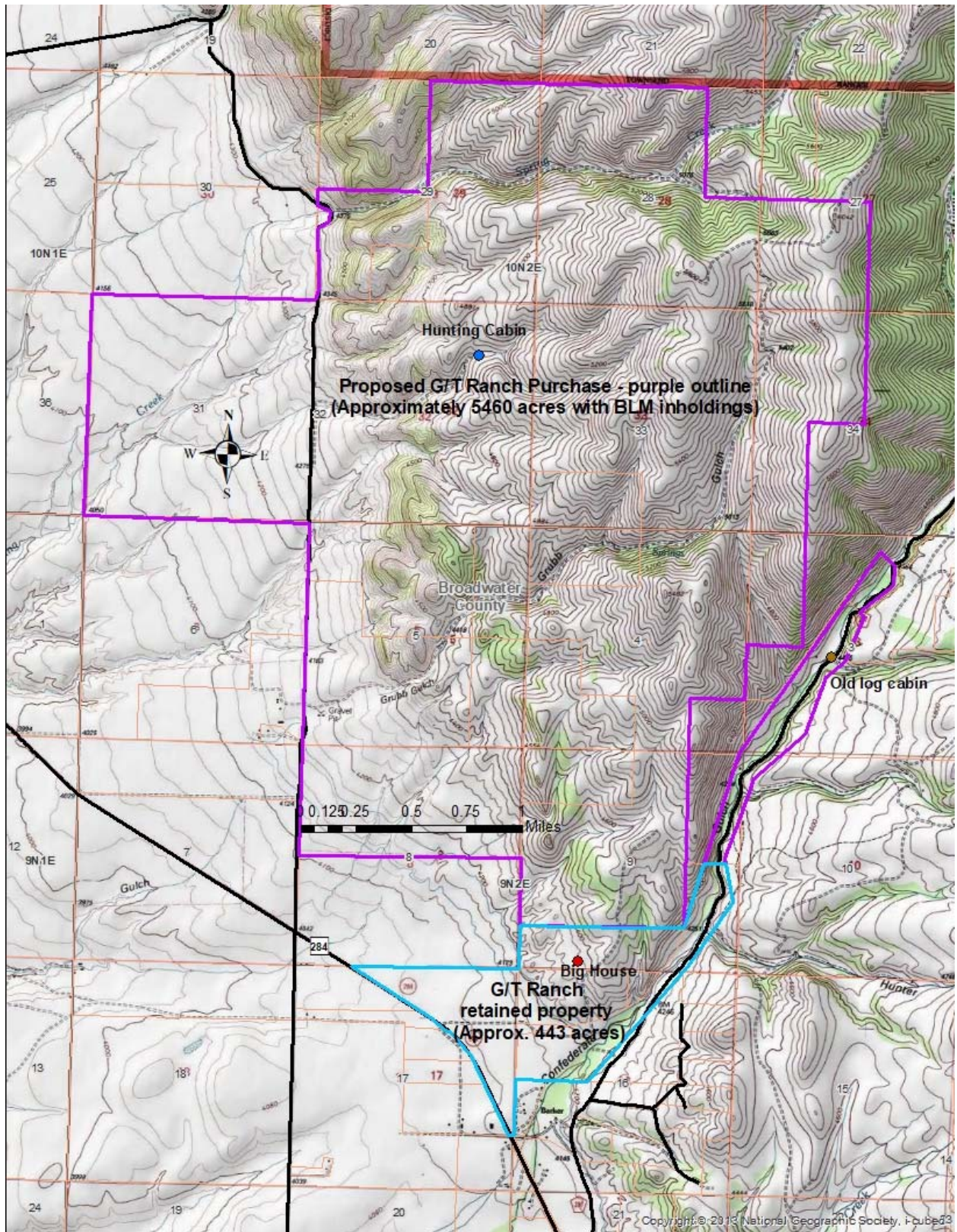


Figure 3: G/T Ranch – topo.

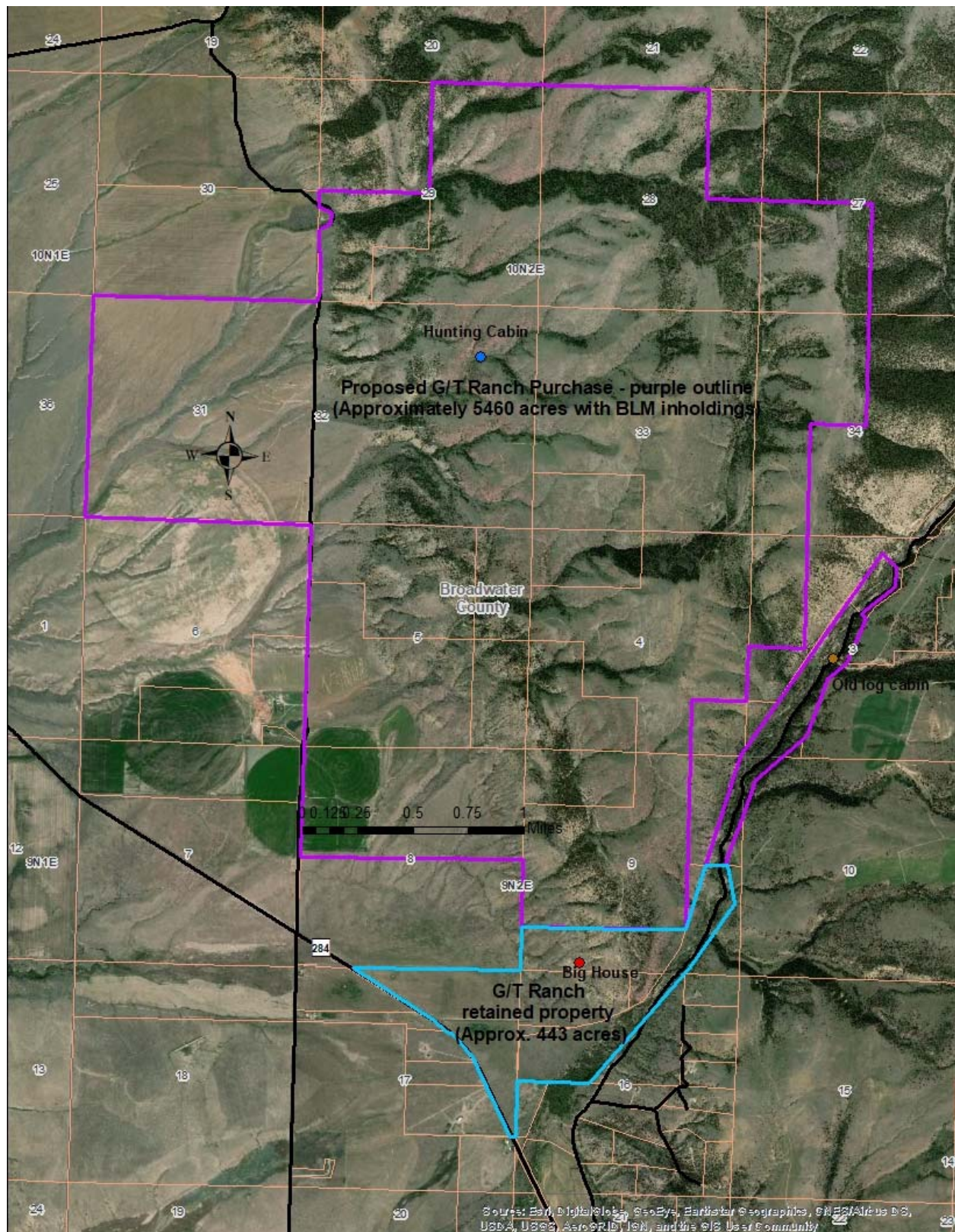


Figure 4: G/T Ranch – aerial.

7. **Project Need – up to 10 pts.**

The property sits in the foothills on the west-side of the Big Belt Mountains in the area between Confederate Gulch and White Gulch. The property which sits adjacent to Helena-Lewis & Clark National Forest, BLM (also includes BLM in-holdings) and DNRC land provides winter range/yearlong habitat to approximately 300+ elk and 150+ mule deer (numbers vary annually and seasonally). Over 80% of the property is Tier I community type habitat. The property has been managed as an amenity ranch primarily for its big game hunting opportunity with limited access for elk and mule deer hunting. The property has acted as an elk refuge area to some degree during the hunting season. As a result, the property has contributed to some extent to elk numbers being over desired numbers on the north end of HD 391, which in turn has led to game damage/landowner tolerance issues on other nearby properties. Given the property's size, the habitat, topography and its location, it's believed that the area would make a good big-game winter-range oriented Wildlife Management Area. Having the property in public ownership would significantly improve public hunting opportunity, particularly for elk, in that area.

8. **Broad Terrestrial and Aquatic Habitat Criteria – up to 10 pts.**

The property is located within the Middle Rockies Ecoregion and the Montane Forest ecotype. The following is an approximate percentage of the community types found on the property – percentages include the BLM in-holdings:

- Big sagebrush-grassland (sagebrush steppe) – 45.2% - Tier I
- Montane grassland – 21.4% - Tier I
- Conifer (Rocky Mountain juniper, ponderosa pine, Douglas fir)-dominated Forest and Woodland (xeric-mesic) – 16.4% - Tier I
- Floodplain/riparian/wet meadow – 1.5% - Tier I
- Deciduous shrubland – 4.0%- Tier II
- Agricultural/introduced vegetation – 11.5% - Tier III (would be restored to permanent cover if not already present)

9. **Project Level Criteria**

a) **Habitat Values – up to 10 pts.**

Over 80% of the property is comprised of a mix of mountain foothill sagebrush-grasslands and conifer-dominated forest and woodlands (xeric). As mentioned previously, the property provides winter range/yearlong habitat to approximately 300+ elk and 150+ mule deer.

- b) **Threat Status:** Unlikely - The property has been managed primarily as an amenity ranch for its big game hunting opportunity. It's likely that is what the property would

be sold for if somebody else were to purchase it. The property already has some agricultural related habitat and given the topography of most of the property it's unlikely that any further habitat conversion would occur.

c) Focal Priority – up to 10 pts.

The property is not located in SWAP Regional Focus Area, nor is it part of an ongoing multi-partner initiative. The property is also not located within a grassland initiative priority county, nor is the property located in an area identified as a priority area in a species or multi-species conservation plan.

d) Geographic Effectiveness – up to 10 pts.

Most of the property is in one large block that sits adjacent to Helena-Lewis & Clark National Forest, BLM (also has BLM in-holdings) and DNRC land. The small separate strip of land adjacent to the Confederate Gulch road would enhance access to adjacent BLM land (would result in a little larger contiguous block of public land) and would also provide access to Confederate Creek (limited fisheries value in that area, as the creek is mostly dewatered prior to reaching that reach).

e) Contribute to hunting and fishing opportunity and other recreation – up to 10 pts.

If the property were to be purchased, the intent would be to manage it as a new Region 3 big-game winter-range oriented WMA. As such, the property would be open for hunting and other forms of non-motorized recreation (consistent with established WMA use policies) except during the winter-range closure period of approximately Dec 1 – May 15. Access to the property would be available from two county roads and from adjacent national forest, BLM and DNRC lands. Given the property's relative proximity to Helena, it's expected that it would receive considerable use.

f) Management Considerations – 10 pts.

Again, if the property were to be purchased, the intent would be to manage it as a new Region 3 big-game winter-range oriented WMA. As such, the property would require all the normal activities associated with the maintenance of a WMA, i.e. fence maintenance, weed control (property has noxious weeds present - spotted knapweed and toadflax are very prevalent in that general area), etc. Additional staff or help would likely be needed at least seasonally to help with the required maintenance activities.

Some amount of boundary fencing would be needed, as the present landowner would be retaining some adjacent property, and there isn't believed to be a fence currently where the property is being proposed to be split. A limited portion of the property is currently grazed by livestock. If there was a desire by the Department to

graze the entire property with livestock, then some amount of internal fencing and additional water development may be needed.

Some amount of habitat management would also likely be required. The areas currently devoted to agricultural production may potentially need to be reseeded to more desired native or introduced species. Rocky Mountain juniper encroachment is negatively impacting big sagebrush-grasslands and deciduous and riparian shrub species to some extent on the property, so some level of juniper control (likely hand-cutting) would likely be desired.

The strip of property along Confederate Gulch/Confederate Creek has some mining claims associated with it, and it's unknown as this time if there are any issues associated with them or not. Lastly, if the property were acquired, some sort of land exchange with the BLM might be desirable to deal with the BLM in-holdings and to block up ownership of each agency's property.